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THE THEOSOPHICAL FORUM.

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Each member can send questions, answers to questions, opinions, and notes upon Theosophical subjects. When necessary, the various communications will be condensed by the editor. Members will be careful to write on only one side of the paper and to use black ink.

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FOR PARAGRAPHS UNDER THE WORD "ANS." THE EDITOR IS PERSONALLY RESPONSIBLE.

August, 1893.

QUESTION CCXLIX.

When I talk Theosophy with Christian friends they say, "What are you going to do about worship and about Christianity as a whole? Here it is, a fact to be dealt with, and a very real fact too. To many minds the existence of a visible Church is the only witness we have to the realities of the spiritual life. If you take away the visible Church and the belief in Jesus Christ as a manifestation of God, what is there by which ordinary people may 'catch on' to the higher life?" Philosophers can work out a religion for themselves, but Theosophy is said to be for all. All can understand the broad principles of Karma and Reincarnation, though if without an authority to which they can appeal, as a Church, a Bible, or a priesthood, how many will accept even these? And suppose they do; can these replace all which makes up the visible part of religion? What is to take the place of the Liturgy, the hymns and anthems; and where are the people to get advice and help in trouble, sickness, and death, as they now can from really good pastors? Surely we shall still want the order of men who specially devote their lives to such work, and is it not better to utilize existing institutions than to leave the work undone? It is all very well to preach new ideas and un-

settle people's minds: they may assent for a time, but in trouble all but a few will revert to old friends and helpers. All ideas must be embodied in forms, or they will not be practiced. The Church is at least the expression of an ideal, however imperfect. If you take it away, the void must be filled by something.

Ans.—First of all, clear the way by recognizing two facts. *First*, the Theosophical Society utterly repudiates either the wish or the right to interfere with any man's religious convictions, ecclesiastical connection, mode of worship, or spiritual nutrition. *Second*, Theosophy itself enters upon no crusade against any particular religion or institution, seeking merely to proclaim truth as the self-acting antidote to error, and to so educate the mind that it shall of its own motion purge valuable institutions of such evils as affect their value, and reject whatever are injurious or outgrown. Until men are able to stand alone, it would regard the forcible removal of props as unphilosophical and irreligious, even where the props are inadequate or antiquated.

Now what is the actual method of an individual Theosophical development? Evidently its initial step is a clear realization of the truth that each man advances in his evolution precisely as he conforms his life and desires to the law of evolution. This is a strictly individual matter, in the sense, that is, that no one can do the work but himself, that it is carried forward only through set purpose and persistent effort, and that theological devices, fancies, or mechanism cannot be substituted for elevation of the nature itself. Such conviction disposes instantly of vicarious atonements, sacramental efficacies, and all ecclesiastical beliefs or rites which are supposed an equivalent to personally-acquired goodness or to divert the direct action of Karma on the Ego. As moral and spiritual strength is acquired, consciousness of its reality forms, perception of supersensual verities grows in acuteness, the law of true progress is demonstrated in experience. Spiritual facts are thus cognized as matters of interior assurance,—a far more conclusive evidence than the testimony of any ecclesiastical organization. What a man *knows* is more established to him than what he *believes*. So too the intellectual apprehension of

Theosophic doctrines becomes clearer. Their accuracy as an expression of fact in the world and the soul vindicates itself; doubts and difficulties diminish; the range of thought broadens and deepens. The essential truth in religious systems receives discrimination from such errors as have historically overlaid it, and thus distaste arises for the exoteric embodiment, while warmer appreciation of the esoteric kernel saves from reckless contempt. Becoming riper in each department of his nature, the developing Theosophist thus acquires knowledge, perception, candor, vigor, self-reliance, and endurance. The course continues indefinitely, but always on the same principle of a shedding-off of weaknesses and evils and an attainment of strength and goodness,—both through persistent effort, by individual exertion, and under known law.

Certainly a course upon such a principle must abate reliance upon, or even care for, an external organization, however minimized its claims. When the realities of the spiritual life are demonstrated by internal consciousness, the Church as a witness becomes superfluous. When certainty through experience has been reached, Bibles and priesthoods are needless as authority, and appeal to either would not suggest itself. All may be cheering as corroborative, yet none be indispensable as proof.

This, of course, is and can be true only of those who have reached a more advanced point than have most men. The status thus produced means larger knowledge and intelligent growth than the majority possess. Hence independence of Church authority and Church ritual as spiritual requisitions can exist only in a minority as yet. But it indicates the *direction* which is inevitable with advance. On the other hand, its present unattainability by the majority shows their need for continued ecclesiastical support, and, if they need it, they ought to have it. To take it away before the need ceased would be either to induce blank infidelity or to educe a new and worse ecclesiasticism. If a man's nature requires an authoritative Church, an incarnate Deity, an infallible Bible, and a guiding priesthood, this requirement must receive recognition from Theosophy just as does any other fact, and the recognition must last as long as the requirement does. Theosophy might

advise larger thought and deeper research and new interpretation, but these are quite different from reckless demolition.

And, indeed, there is still another fact. To a very respectable and intelligent class of sincerely spiritual men there is genuine edification in public worship, that including hymns, prayers, and the use of sacred books. Those who deny it simply show that they don't know anything about it. A common aspiration, a reverent ritual, a seemly homage are congruous with, even ministrant to, real devotion. It is entirely possible that not a few Theosophists miss these, would be glad to have them, and would be the better for them, if they could be had without the elements which at present annul their efficacy. Even a teaching order, trained for the purpose and therefore more effective than volunteers, might have very great use. But all this would mean an optional system, disclaiming authority, infallibility, or finality, and welcome only as it voiced truth and promoted edification. It could not have a creed or sacraments or a priesthood, and it would be a voluntary union of the like-minded, not a commissioned Church for the world.

And so, to sum up, the rational course would seem to be a liberalization and purification of existing instiutions for those who still need such, a constant effort to educe a spiritual character able to stand alone, and the formation of new institutions for those who, while able to stand alone, find added strength from association in public worship with fellow-thinkers who are equally free in thought and equally sincere in aspiration. A voluntary Society for praise and prayer is just as legitimate as one for study, and if it could not have the prestige of history it would not have the paralysis of superstition, dogma, and formalism.

QUESTION CCL.

What evidence is there of the existence of any such exalted beings as the Masters or Mahatmas?

W. Q. J.—Evidence is of several different kinds, and the inquirer should not confine himself to one single department

of evidence or testimony. I assume that in using the word "evidence" the questioner means to include testimony as well. There is testimony of very extensive nature to the existence of Masters or Mahatmas in history and tradition, and these two again divide themselves into many sorts. There is profane as well as religious history, tradition depending on recollection solely, and also tradition which has been turned into an historical account of tradition. In religious history and tradition there are many accounts of such beings, reaching from the earliest known religious book down to the very latest date. And in the history of nations, aside from religion, there are numerous accounts of Adepts, magicians, Masters, and others of like character. In almost every country on the globe the traditions of the people are full of statements of the existence and powers and appearances of master minds, magicians, great men, who knew the secrets of nature. United States history of course is very young and need not be called upon for an answer, but the history of Europe as well as its traditions confirms the statements I have made. Going to Asia we have an immense mass of tradition and history telling the same story, while China and all her dependencies relate similar tales of such beings. In the East everywhere there is a universal belief that they exist, have existed, and will appear again. All this cannot be set aside as folly or useless or insufficient, unless one determines to believe nothing but what he himself has seen. If that position be assumed, then no one living to-day can say that they know or believe that the historical characters of the past, known to every nation, had any existence. Turning now to later testimony, we have that of H. P. B., A. P. Sinnett, H. S. Olcott, Mrs Besant, hundreds of Hindus, many Europeans, some Americans, all telling the same story that they know that the Adepts, Masters, Mahatmas exist and have communicated with or to them. The fact that the inquirer may not have communicated with the Adepts does not dispose of them, nor does it invalidate the testimony of other persons.

Turning from this department of proof we have that which depends upon argument, illustration, deduction. Here everything is as strongly in favor of the existence of the exalted

beings spoken of as in the other department; for evolution demands that such beings shall exist. To this conclusion even such a doubter as Prof. Huxley has come, and in his last essays declares for the existence of beings of superior intelligence who are as much beyond us as we are beyond the black beetle, and this is more than any Theosophist has ever yet said for the Adepts. If the questioner proceeds along these lines he will come to the same conclusion as many another inquirer has come to.

Ans.—Direct evidence would be of three kinds,—from persons who had seen them, from persons who had received letters demonstrably by them, from persons who had received information obtainable in no other quarter. Each of these kinds is producible. (1.) Abundant instances are given in the Appendix to the *Occult World*, in *Hints on Esoteric Theosophy*, *No. 1*, and elsewhere. (2.) This would be where the letters could not have been written by any one else, where they were received by occult means, or where the contents referred to matters unknown to any one save the recipient. The first would include cases of precipitation, of the use of paper, etc., peculiar to the writers and of texture unfound elsewhere, of marginal notes proved not to have existed when the letters bearing them were mailed, of responses to requests not known to or accessible by any other than the writer. Instances are given in the above works, and further ones of all three classes are within the ken of private Theosophists who state the facts to sincere inquirers. Mrs. Besant has publicly mentioned her own experience in this matter; and the MSS. deposited during H.P.B.'s sleep, the composition, penmanship, etc., whereof are described by Col. Olcott in "Old Diary Leaves", are a clear illustration. The proofs of genuineness are too copious to give here, but they may easily be found in the printed accounts. (3.) The most striking illustration of this is the publication of the Esoteric Philosophy in the West. This Philosophy was in the possession of no one save the Masters and a certain learned class in India. It was considered peculiarly sacred and arcane, and a revelation of it to any foreigner would have been felt most

sacrilegious. Madame Blavatsky could not possibly have secured it from them. The only other quarter was the Masters, and as she did publish it They must have supplied it. This was her invariable assertion, and, indeed, she even gave out writings unknown to the Hindus. It is worthy of remark, furthermore, that the resentment with which her first revelations were met by the Indian class referred to changed when the genuineness of her status and mission was perceived. The demonstration that she was an agent of Masters was so conclusive that men who had opposed her as profaning the mysteries afterwards recognized her as acting under authority and bowed to the policy she announced. Such a change in those who fully believed in Masters but were horrified at a procedure begun in Their name and could not reconcile themselves to it until overwhelmingly convinced of its authorization, is strong proof of what *they* considered evidence as to the existence of Masters and their active participation in human affairs.

The argument as to Masters is both *à priori* and *à posteriori*. The latter we cannot reject on grounds which would not be equally fatal to testimony on any other subject within human investigation. Testimony has always been adjudged adequate if made by witnesses sufficiently intelligent, of trustworthy character, and with due opportunity for observation. Each of these requisitions is fulfilled in the many witnesses who have testified to personal sight of Masters. It is exactly the same kind of evidence as that we accept upon matters which we have not ourselves seen or experienced. All of us believe that there is a Czar of Russia, though very few of us have seen him. Reputable persons, however, have, and there is a plentitude of proof as to his existence. A Master is not a more antecedently improbable character in the nineteenth century than is a Czar, and the proofs of his actuality are quite as potent. Of course, if a person says "I shall not believe in Masters unless I see one", he cannot be constrained to do otherwise. It may not be a very logical position, it is certainly not one which he takes as to other objects or places, nor is it one which will probably lead to conviction, since Masters do not show Themselves in order to convince sceptics, and it assumes what is by no means sure, namely, that he

would know one if he saw Him and would believe. This notion Mr. Wm. Main has delightfully treated in a "A Conversation on Mahatmas" in *Path* for October, 1892.

There is another support to the doctrine of Masters which has no scientific weight, is not capable of demonstration, and which is adduced only for the edification of Theosophists. It is the career of the Theosophical Society. An insignificant body numerically, and for some time not broadly at work, it has within a few years gained the attention of the intelligent world, has stamped its message on the mind of the age, and has a rapidly increasing hold upon the press. The expansion of Theosophy is a phenomenon of the time. Now the T.S. has always claimed to be a child of Masters and to have Their protection, and Theosophists familiar with its history are persuaded that not otherwise can the success of its message be explained. Of course it may be said that the truth of the doctrines accounts for their spread. This would be a queer position for an opponent to take, especially as the doctrine of Masters is one of the most conspicuous, and it ignores the fact that the doctrines, whether true or not, are in sharp contradiction to most that is time-honored, consecrated, revered in the conventional mind. If unpopular teachings are daily securing more attention and esteem, and if contemporary thought is becoming ever more colored by them, it *looks* as if unseen forces were active behind the teachings, and as if the changing spirit of the time showed marks of abler hands than guide the Society or prepare its literature. If the phenomenon can otherwise be accounted for, well and good; but can it?

QUESTION CCXL *(Concluded).*

K. E. Turnbull.—The editor of the FORUM in his answer to Question CCXL in the June issue says that though a man may be charged with selfishness in keeping to himself his own property, he cannot be so characterized when he is keeping property merely entrusted to him by the "real owners". In the ordinary affairs of life and of business dealing this is incon-

trovertible; but as applied to the possession of truths regarding the ultimate benefit of humanity, can the term "real owners" be used in the sense of exclusive proprietorship, when each fragment of the race is the "heir of all the ages"?

That it is so applied by those who adhere to the theory of adeptship is not contested; but the question is, whether this theory is just in the light of reason and experience. As stated by these advocates, knowledge of the hidden forces of Nature should always be a monopoly of a few, *i.e.* a close corporation, so to say, of adepts who impart some fragments acquired by them from yet higher initiates to a select few, who, by their lives of self-discipline, chiefly exemplified in the practice of preserving secrets inviolate and a docile faith in the teacher, have rendered themselves fit repositaries for the truths so imparted. But why repositaries at all? We do not construct reservoirs to hold stores of water till it becomes stagnant and scummed over with slime by disuse; yet this is what those who hoard their store for themselves are doing. There are channels and conduits leading from such receptacles in order to render them of practical use, by which streams are furnished in every direction to such as stand in need. Water has ever stood as the symbol of truth: "let whosoever *will* drink of the water of life *freely*" is the generous, open-hearted instinct of every lover of truth, who having found or having been led to some rivulet of the vast river straightway hastens to supply his thirsty, toil-laden comrades with the same life-giving refreshment.

What purpose does a knowledge serve that is closely tied up in a knot of individuals solemnly sworn to silence and secrecy? The whole spirit of the age is opposed to such a policy. This very thing it is which has led to revolt and revolution all over the civilized world; that has paved the way for the founding of our free institutions that are the glory of our land and the blessing of all the scattered nations of the earth; that has marked priestcraft and religious domination throughout the history of every ecclesiastical institution; and here, at the threshold of the twentieth century, with all this fund of experience flowing down to us through the ages, we are asked to believe in the

wisdom of restricting knowledge, and are cajoled into accepting the belief that it is good for the majority of mankind to be kept thus ignorant while the few are instructed.

Though it is safe to assert that such views will never be accepted by the enlightened majority, there are those of vivid imaginations and of over-confiding natures who will always be allured by the fascinating possibility of chancing upon a hidden store, and of acquiring control over the forces of nature. How illusive such a hope necessarily must be, when they are asked, as the first step toward attainment, to place implicit faith in a teacher and teachings which they can precedently know nothing of, they do not pause to consider; they do not even realize that such a course of procedure would be accounted as madly foolish in any other circumstance of life; nor do they even weigh and mark the characters of those who, whether as fellow pupils or as teachers, are authorized to instruct the newcomer. Yet the Editor of the FORUM tells us that "a long and rigorous preparatory course is exacted", and "only as the character is thus shaped into congruity" [with the truths to be received, presumably] can we expect knowledge to be vouchsafed. Here, then, is offered a valuable test, which we would do ill to ignore. If this be as said, we have but to scan clearly and impartially the characters and conduct of those honored with a partial revelation, to judge whether the truths taught are haply of such high import as declared. If we see such instructed ones sage and saintly beyond others, so that whole communities mark and honor their rare elevation of character, as seen, for example, in certain instances among the Rishis of India, the Prophets of Israel, and the wise men of classic history, then we may indeed place safe reliance on the worth of a wisdom that produces such blessed fruitage and flower.

But where no such unusual effects are observed,—where even the average intelligence and moral fibre seem no whit heightened or strengthened, why should we credit the secret store with a value rarer than that of the knowledge and ethical teaching open to the world at large, when we have manifold examples of the happiest results produced by the latter influences? It is a common-place of every-day observation that the

training of any one faculty will quicken the dormancy of others, so that the level of intelligence is raised all round; hence it is not unreasonable, nor unfair, to look for a like result in those favored with a superior teaching.

Again it is urged by the advocates of restricted knowledge as exemplified in adeptship that only such truths may be disseminated as are not open to mis-use. Here again experience shows the fallacy involved. Is it not said by these self-same teachers that no man can receive until ready for the truth? One may proclaim aloud the profoundest secrets in a tongue unknown to the hearer, and he be none the wiser; is not the like true of the disclosure of an occult law to an unready listener? If the would-be aspirant is not fitted by comprehension, how would he be apt to injure himself or another?

Electricity is a dangerous force, one that only a skilled operator may safely deal with. But would an Edison forbear to explain his processes in an electrician's terms, couched in Mother English, to an uninstructed Dahoman on the ground that the latter might misunderstand, or might make a misuse of the information so given? It would simply be a dead-letter to him, as though it were still unuttered so far as he is concerned, and the case is precisely analogous with an impartation of occult lore to him incapable of assimilating it, according to the very dicta of adepts themselves. Therefore it is contended if the man is *ready to receive, he should receive, free of all pledges and restrictions;* if he is not ready, pledges and restrictions are of no avail, for he is as powerless to understand and impart what he hears as a person ignorant of algebra would be, should an illustration be presented to him of an ordinary law in algebraic terminology.

Thus viewed, is the theory sound on which adeptship rests? It is for every F.T.S. to inquire of himself whether the experience of life, the experience of history, the ethical standard, and the hope of an ideal future for humanity, justify the belief in a wisdom so closely guarded as to be practically non-existent for the race at large. Is this the vaunted fraternity of a "universal brotherhood irrespective of race, creed, sex, caste, or color"?

The Editor's final plea is for faith,—the whole tenor of his words being that of a devout self-surrender. But this is the very claim urged on us by adherents of every religion, and it is what the Theosophist has freed himself from in relation to Christianity. Why then should he place himself in a like abject attitude of blind faith toward a new hierarchy, composed of men and women like unto himself? Unless all evidences belie, this is an age of reason, not of a grovelling faith; and in the name of reason the old religionism with its obsolete requisitions has been rejected and the new philosophy advanced as worthier of acceptance.

But what philosophy engages faith in the enquirer? The Lord Buddha himself urged upon his followers to accept nothing that left the reason unsatisfied. How, then, can it be demanded of the Esoteric Theosophist to accept that, and unquestioningly, which is addressed to his *faith*, and not to his *judgment?*

QUESTION CCLI.

Will not the force which tips tables, causes flowers to be produced, etc. do more astonishing things if properly directed? How do you explain the phenomena?

W. Q. J.—There is not the slightest doubt that the force referred to in the question will do more astonishing things, and it looks as if the person asking the question had not read of the most extraordinary and astonishing things which have been done by that force, both when it was properly and improperly directed. The limits of the FORUM would not permit of the explanation of the phenomena asked about, but full explanations have been given in the *Path*, in *Lucifer*, by Eliphas Levi, in the *Key to Theosophy*, and elsewhere.

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